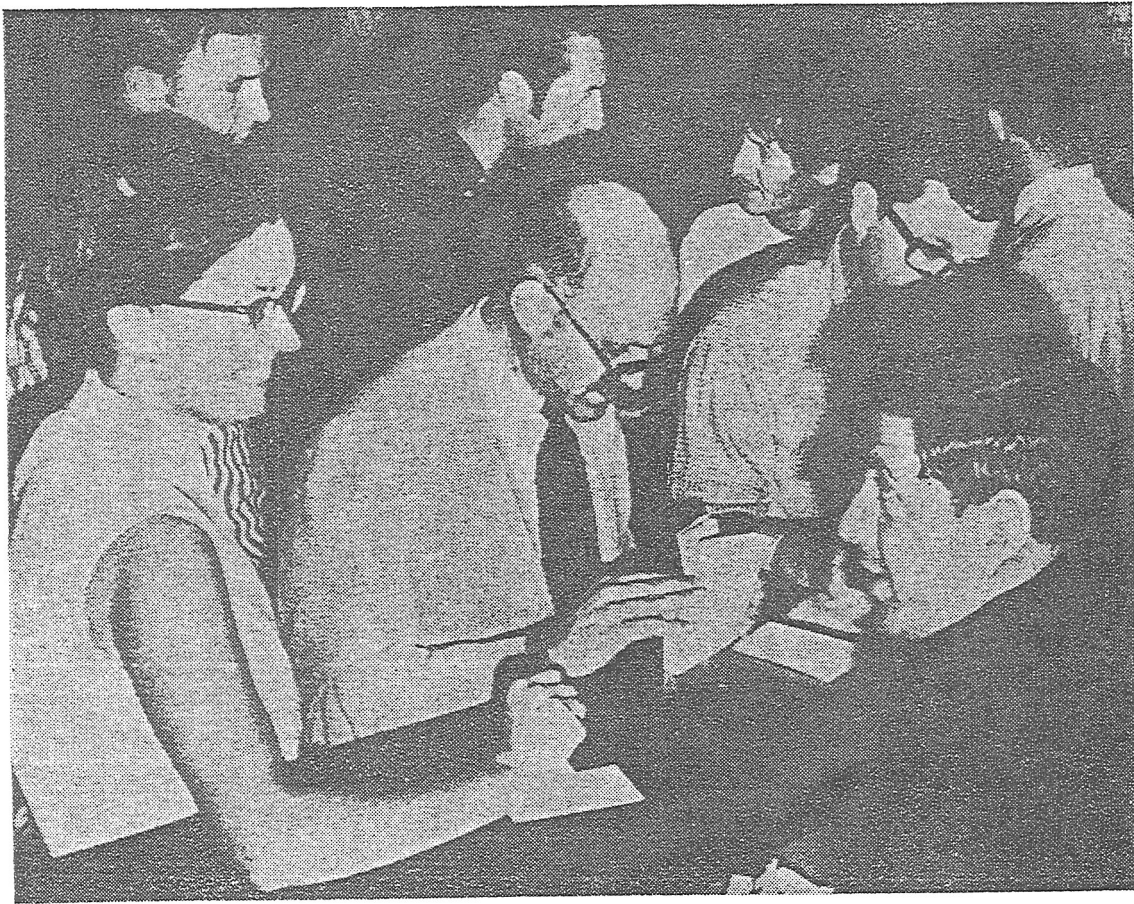




Associated Press

Those passengers freed from the two hijacked planes in Jordan register at the Intercontinental Hotel in Amman.

Soviets Postponing Action on Mideast

By Anthony Astrachan
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, Sept. 8.—The Soviets have replied to the United States on the Middle East crisis, informed sources said today.

The sources said they could not reveal the contents of the reply to a note delivered last Thursday by U.S. Ambassador Jacob D. Beam. But they did say that the Soviets once more seemed to be postponing action in the hope of making maximum gains from the interplay of other forces.

Other observers had drawn the same conclusion from the pattern of Soviet press reports since the weekend, including total silence on the hijacking of three Western aircraft by Palestinian guerrillas Sunday. The silence bespeaks embarrassment in the Kremlin, the observers believe.

The Soviets have seemed anxious recently to play down

their support of the Arab commandos. Party leader Brezhnev sounded as though he was warning the guerrillas to behave when he spoke on foreign policy in Alma Ata Aug. 28. Glowing press reports of guerrilla successes tailed off sharply about two months ago.

The Soviets also dislike the guerrillas' air piracy. Leonid Zamyatin, then the government spokesman, said last March, "We are against all actions of terror including actions against civilian aircraft."

They are reluctant, the analysts believe, to come out with a condemnation of the guerrillas, who may become heroes or even dominant power factors in the Arab world. The Soviets also want to be sure how their moves may interact with those of the Western states affected by the hijackers.

They are therefore putting off action to preserve their op-

tions, a diplomatic tactic frequently used by the Kremlin.

Moscow may have been doing the same thing in a Tass report from Cairo. The report said that Egypt had sent the United States a memorandum "officially refuting Israeli charges about the alleged installation of new missiles in the Suez Canal zone" after the cease-fire agreement went into effect.

The report was printed in Pravda today. The news was not carried by Western news agencies operating from Cairo. Diplomats who would normally know of such an Egyptian memorandum said they were not aware one had been delivered, though they knew Egyptian Foreign Minister Mahmoud Riad had called on Donald Bergus, the senior U.S. representative in Cairo.

Tass made no mention of American evidence that mis-

siles have been moved into the canal zone in violation of the agreement.

Tass quoted the memorandum as saying, "All the missiles now present in the Suez Canal zone were already there before the agreement on the temporary cease-fire came into force."

Tass said Egypt drew Washington's attention to new American arms deliveries to Israel and to Israeli fortifications in Sinai which "demonstrate" that Israel does not intend to leave Sinai or fulfill the Security Council resolution of Nov. 22, 1967.

Some analysts thought the Tass "exclusive" showed that the Soviets were supporting Cairo's tactic of denial. Others thought that such use of Tass preserved the options. It could be construed as evidence of support for the Egyptian position. It could also be disavowed.